

What is claimed is:

1. In a system for handling an article having first and second portions of differing stretch characteristics, a method for distinguishing the first and second portions from one another, the method comprising applying a stretching force to one of the first and second portions of the article and detecting a reaction of the one portion in response to the stretching force as an indication of which of the first and second portions was stretched.
2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the applying of a stretching force comprises grasping the one portion of the article at spaced locations thereon and moving at least one of the spaced locations further apart.
3. The method according to claim 1, wherein the detecting of a reaction comprises sensing an amount by which the article stretches in response to the stretching force.
4. The method according to claim 1, wherein the detecting of a reaction comprises sensing a resistance of the article to the stretching force.
5. The method according to claim 1, wherein the detecting of a reaction comprises comparing the reaction to a predetermined set of reaction values corresponding to the respective first and second portions of the article.
6. The method according to claim 1, wherein the system comprises conveying a plurality of articles in sequence with each article being randomly oriented with one of the first and second portions in a relatively leading disposition and the other of the first and second portions in a relatively trailing disposition.
7. The method according to claim 6, wherein the system further comprises presenting each article of the plurality of articles in sequence to a processing station whereat the stretching force is applied to the leading and/or the trailing end of each article.
8. The method according to claim 7, and further comprising handling each article with the first portion thereof in leading disposition in one manner for subsequent processing and handling each article with the second portion thereof in leading disposition in another manner for subsequent processing.
9. The method according to claim 8, and further comprising reorienting each article with the second portion thereof in leading disposition to reverse the leading and trailing ends thereof.

10. The method according to claim 1, and further comprising controlling an orientation of the article for subsequent processing according to the detecting of a reaction to the stretching force.

11. The method according to claim 1, wherein the article is a textile good.

12. The method according to claim 1, wherein the article is a hosiery item having a toe end and a cuff end of differing stretch characteristics.

13. In a system for handling an article having first and second portions of differing stretch characteristics, apparatus for distinguishing the first and second portions from one another, the apparatus comprising a device for applying a stretching force to one of the first and second portions of the article and a device for detecting a reaction of the one portion in response to the stretching force as an indication of which of the first and second portions was stretched.

14. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the stretching force applying device comprises elements for grasping the one portion of the article at spaced locations thereon and for moving at least one of the elements further apart from the spaced locations.

15. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the reaction detecting device comprises a detector for sensing an amount by which the article stretches in response to the stretching force.

16. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the reaction detecting device comprises a detector for sensing a resistance of the article to the stretching force.

17. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the reaction detecting device comprises a controller for comparing the reaction to a predetermined set of reaction values corresponding to the respective first and second portions of the article.

18. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the system comprises a transport structure for conveying a plurality of articles in sequence with each article being randomly oriented with one of the first and second portions in a relatively leading disposition and the other of the first and second portions in a relatively trailing disposition.

19. The apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the transport structure includes a processing station to which each article of the plurality of articles is presented in sequence, the stretching force applying device being disposed at the processing station for applying the stretching force to the leading end or the trailing end of each article.

20. The apparatus according to claim 19, and further comprising an arrangement for handling each article with the first portion thereof in leading disposition in one manner for subsequent processing and for handling each article with the second portion thereof in leading disposition in another manner for subsequent processing.

21. The apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the arrangement further comprises a device for reorienting each article with the second portion thereof in leading disposition to reverse the leading and trailing ends thereof.

22. The apparatus according to claim 13, and further comprising an arrangement for controlling an orientation of the article for subsequent processing in response to the reaction detecting device.

23. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the article is a textile good.

24. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the article is a hosiery item having a toe end and a cuff end of differing stretch characteristics.